

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY WORK IN URBAN
DEVELOPMENT IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

BY: RODRECK MUPEDZISWA, M.SC
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, HARARE.

A PAPER PRESENTED AT A CITY OF HARARE
STAFF AND COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERSHIP
TRAINING COURSE AT THE CITY COUNCIL'S
MBARE TRAINING CENTRE.

6th - 10th October 1986.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY WORK IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

The Meaning of Development

"Development appears as a broad and complex concept containing components from societal as well as economic theories". (R. Sjoström et al, 1983; p. 18). This complexity has rendered the concept difficult to define. In the 1960s, when the so called modernization theory was fashionable, the term development referred basically to economic growth. However, in the last decade or so, there has been a strong reaction against this philosophy possibly induced by the fact that in spite of considerable growth in many countries, inequality is still wide spread.

One of the greatest critics of the old philosophy which equated economic growth with development was Dudley Seers (1972). This eminent scholar attacked this idea in very strong terms and he argued in part, "The question to ask a country's development are therefore..What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality?" (D Seers 1972). The essence of his argument was that if all three of these aspects have declined from high levels, then that particular country would have experienced a period of development. However, if any of these central problems has been growing worse, then it would be naive to call the result 'development', even if per capital income had doubled.

The likes of Seers set the ball rolling and in recent years there has been a general realization that development represents much more than economic growth and the simple quantitative measurement of incomes, employment and inequality. Todaro, M (1977) is one of these who concur with this new line of thinking and indeed he speaks for many when he says, "Development must therefore be conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitude and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty". (p. 96).

From thumbing through literature on development issues, two fundamental errors can be identified, particularly with regard to the way that the concept of development has been conceived of. The first error is to do with equating economic growth with development *per se*. As already mentioned, many governments have revised their way of thinking in this regard and this error has since been rectified. A second error has to do with what Lipton (1977) has termed "urbanbias". Many governments equated development with urban growth and hence concentrated resources in urban areas which resulted in fundamental rural/urban imbalances. While some governments have heeded the warning against favouring the urban areas at the expense of the rural areas, urban bias is still a chronic disease in many developing countries today. Thus while most developing countries have managed to re-define the concept of development, a majority of them still has not yet succeeded in their efforts to rectify the imbalance particularly in terms of resource allocation that exists between the rural and urban areas. The facilities in the rural areas of most developing countries continue to lag far behind those in the urban areas. Having said that it should be quickly added that in spite of the urban areas being superior to the rural areas in terms of resource and infrastructure, the same urban areas are still faced with unnumberable problems in such areas as housing and health etc.

Recently, while delivering a lecture on Urbanization to a group of students, I posed the question: Is it better to be poor in an ^{urban} setting than in a rural situation? I was not surprised when the students gave varying responses. Predictably some responded in favour of urban areas, arguing that at least social welfare services are better developed and are more readily accessible in urban areas. Other respondents, however, argued in favour of rural areas, pointing out that in rural areas even the poorest of the poor can at least afford a roof above their heads, that neighbours in a rural setting are always willing to help due to the type of social networks that exist there. If I were to pose the same question to you today, I wonder if your responses would be any different from the ones outline above? The point I am making is that, in spite of the urban bias in terms of resource allocation etc, it is an open secret that these urban areas are faced with problems that are just as daunting as those experienced by their rural counterparts. From this submission it follows that the urban community worker has just as daunting a task before him as that confronting his rural colleague as far as aiding the development process is concerned.

The Concept of Community Work

Various strategies of urban development have been adopted and implemented with varying degrees of success in different countries. One of these strategies has been that of community work. The term community work, like the concept of development, is multi-faceted and hence difficult to define. Baldock (1974) like many others has attempted a definition and he says community work is a "type of activity practised by people who are employed to help others to identify problems and opportunities that they have and to come to realistic decisions to take collective action to meet those problems and opportunities in ways that they determine for themselves." From this explanation it is somewhat evident that community work is not only concerned with addressing problems but more positively with identifying opportunities as well. In other words community work does not only seek to 'cure' problems when they have occurred but perhaps more importantly to prevent problems from occurring.

Aims of Community Work

Community work has the following among its major aims:-

- (i) To help people improve their own living conditions through self help projects.
- (ii) To develop responsible local leadership.
- (iii) To give people a sense of citizenship - responsibility to the nation and consciousness of their rights.
- (iv) To introduce and strengthen democracy at the grass roots level through local participation in decision making and planning.
- (v) To enable people to grow in themselves and to maintain co-operative and constructive relationships.

Values of Community Work

According to Leaper (1981) Community Work has the following values:-

- (i) To respect the clients or community
- (ii) To accept the client(s)
- (iii) Not to condemn the client (or community)
- (iv) To uphold his/their right to self-determination
- (v) To respect his/her confidence

The Concept of Community Development

Many writers in this field (e.g. Rothman, 1979, Ross, M 1963) agree that there are basically three models of community work, namely locality development (or Community Development), Social Planning and Social Action. The major concern of this paper is with the concept of Community Development. But what is meant by this concept? On a historical note the term community development meant "Mass Education". It referred to educating citizens, to impress it upon them that citizenship begins in a small unit of population where common loyalty and common interests are expressed in daily activities. The aim was to get people to be aware of, understand and take part in and ultimately control the economic and social aspects of their activities..

Initially community development was viewed as a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and the initiative of the community. Community development is said to have originated in the failure of programmes which concentrated upon production and the concrete aspects of development. The flaw in these methods was that they overlooked the social context in which development took place. A United Nations (1971) report emphasized the importance of the human element. It concluded that although the social and economic aspects are both essential to balanced growth, the human aspect must be given prime consideration if efforts to upliftment in underdeveloped countries are to succeed. It further argued that in particular community development should promote popular participation in development and institution building towards this end.

Today community development has been described as a movement, an approach, a technique or series of techniques for evoking self-help as a process; it has even been referred to as a philosophy. In addition, the term community development refers:-

- to the betterment^{and} development of local conditions through community efforts and thereby building institutions or infrastructures through which people can participate, contribute and manage some of their affairs.
- to a positive approach in the handling of people's affairs which aims at developing the initiative of the individuals, groups and communities by way of obtaining the willingness of people to participate and contribute in schemes which promote their own betterment.
- to the strengthening of existing institutions and groups or organisations in their voluntary work to the community. This can be achieved through the formulation of co-ordinating bodies etc.
- to a planned and organised way of placing responsibility for decision making in local affairs on the freely elected representatives of a community or local authority. In this context, people are assisted to acquire knowledge, skills and resources required to raise the standard of living through communal self help and organization.

In short, the community development approach emphasizes use of local resources and labour management. It assumes the presence of an internal stimulus in the community to encourage the use of local resources. Participation and self-help are the watch words. Successful community development is perceived when a community appreciates its obligations and responsibilities for its own development.

Community Development in an Urban Environment

One of the most dramatic phenomena in the Third World today is the unprecedented growth of their cities. The two major contributing factors to this effect are the rate of natural increase and perhaps more important, rural to urban migration. The problems arising in relation with this growth are overwhelming, both in nature and extent. As a result of this unprecedented increase in the urban population, the growth of urban infrastructure and public utilities is considerably lagging behind population growth. A notable consequence of this is the discrepancy between existing needs and available means to meet them. Good examples are in relation to such areas as health facilities and housing and even recreation.

According to C. Berthalet (1963), community development in an urban environment can be described as: the complex of processes by which the initiative and the self help activities of the urban population are linked to the efforts of the urban authorities in order to: (a) improve the economic, social and cultural living situation of the urban population and (b) to integrate the life of urban people and of the smaller urban communities effectively into the bigger forms of urban community life and to enable them to contribute as much as possible to the overall urban and national development.

Community development in urban areas does differ in accentuation and appearance with that in rural areas. This is basically due to difference in such aspects as the economic situation in the rural and urban areas, the diverging attitudes of farmers and city dwellers, the deviating interpersonal relationships and social structures, the differing degree of dynamism and the variety of the urban pattern of life and as Berthalet (1963) puts it, "the large difference in the available infrastructure, provisions and possibilities that one can take as a starting point...." These may be massive differences between rural and urban situations but it should be pointed out that the ultimate objective^s of community development are the same in both situations.

Goals of Urban Community Development

Berthalet (1963) identified at least five goals of urban community development; and these are:-

- i) stimulation of social cohesion of the potential 'we feeling' of the heterogeneous urban population groups. Closely related to this stimulation process are of course efforts to raise the citizens' feeling of confidence and their pride in belonging to the urban community..
- ii) encouragement of the initiative and the inclination of the population to participate collectively, actively and in properly organized fashion in the urban ~~govt~~ and the running of the urban public affairs, or to provide for needs, or find solutions for existing common problems via the method of "aided self-help".

- iii) the creation, improvement or extension of the organizational and administrative structure that will be necessary for the functioning and channelling of this community initiative and the formation of the indispensable cadres (for this purpose).
- iv) improvement of the general economic, social and cultural well-being of the people through communal action, basic education efforts and adaptation of the people to the urban way of life.
- v) the provision of assistance to the weaker groups within the urban community.

Fields of Urban Community Development

In the urban situation, the practical activities that may be a subject of self-help community action differ to a considerable extent from those that are commonly included in the normal rural work pattern. Among the activities that may be taken into consideration for urban aided self-help action, one can enumerate inter alia, the following topics:-

- a) Public Amenities including common facilities such as halls, grounds, parks, schools, creches, libraries, community centres etc with a view to involvement/participation and management of such facilities by a locality.
- b) Recreation - This would include the encouragement and organisation of social cultural and other recreational activities in the fields of sports, drama, music, dance, excursions, fairs, social evenings, communal reading or singing, the stimulation of youth and club work etc.
- c) Co-operatives, Small Industries and Trade - This would include foundation of producers' consumers' and credit co-operatives and activities would cover training in management, leadership, simple accounting, stock checking etc.
- d) Health Issues - especially primary health education but also the building and maintenance of ward clinics, consultation bureaux and first aid posts, sanitation activities and the organization of inoculation or vaccination campaigns.
- e) Literacy/Adult Education - The imparting of basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy as well as the organisation of adult education programmes in the fields of home economics, health, nutrition, family planning, child care and house making in general, the provision of vocational training and guidance for trade and industry, of courses in civics and the organization of community self help action, the making available of papers, periodics and books and indeed the putting of posters and wall papers.
- f) Agricultural Aspects - Such as educating people about livestock or horticulture
- g) Miscellaneous Activities - including spiritual activities, youths and women's clubs, the provision of material and immaterial aid to the needy, the handicapped the sick, the aged and other groups in distress; the making available of free legal advice to the poor, city clean-ups and improvement of the urban situation in general.

Cornerstones of Urban Community Development

The community development idea as far as urban areas are concerned, is based on two fundamental elements;

- a) an active and considerable contribution of the urban population to the efforts to raise the level of living of the communities in question.
- b) an at least as active and important contribution from the side of the Municipal authorities.

Thus both the people and the authorities must participate if meaningful urban development is to be reached. On the part of the population this means they:-

- become conscious of their needs and wishes.
- make them known and look for suitable solutions.
- evaluate their communal resources (e.g. labour, finance etc) and put them at the community's disposal to improve their situations.

On the part of the authorities, it means that they have to:-

- start by making the people conscious of the nature and extent of the urban needs (break fatalism that often exists).
- support the efforts of the people to the maximum of their abilities morally, financially, technically and otherwise.
- assist and guide in organising the population for its community self help work.
- provide for an effective mutual co-ordination of all these private activities and initiatives and the timely integration of them into the overall development policy laid down by the municipal authorities.
- let the people and their representatives taken an active part in the government of the city (i.e. active participation).
- provide for the training and availability of the professional and lay cadres without which community development cannot exist.

Conditions for Success of Community Development in Urban Context

In order to achieve the goals mentioned above, the following conditions will have to be met:

- i) Community development will have to be made an integral part of the overall urban, regional and national development effort.
- ii) the authorities must not only pay lip service to the idea of decentralization and devolution of municipal power; they must be ready to accept the concept of participation of the population in the city's public affairs.
- iii) the responsible authorities must ^{only} appeal to the people for help and secure their enthusiastic collaboration but they have to provide them with cadres, an organizational framework and the necessary resources
- iv) When community development work is started, this should be done at a critical minimum scale that will guarantee within a limited amount of time so many results that the movement that has been put under way will not lose momentum; it will increase, become self-sustaining and will go on indefinitely.

The Community Worker's Role in Urban Community Development

The community worker has an important part to play in urban community development. He acts as a link between the people on the one hand and the authorities on the other. According to Baldock (1974) the community worker has basically two roles to play, namely, those of 'initiator' and 'assistant'. When wearing the initiator's hat, the community worker has to play such roles as those of researcher and analyser, provider of services (e.g. at an advice centre) and agitator. When wearing the hat of 'assistant', the practitioner performs a service role (e.g. as community centre warden), he offers advice and information on law, administration etc, he is an interpreter for the community and a mediator either between the community and statutory bodies or other community groups.

Community workers have as one of their major tasks to educate the community in discovering 'real' needs, that is, those which are strategic for development. And it is logical to assume that where resources are limited, voluntary efforts may be essential. But maybe one pre-condition for success here is that the political environment has to be conducive. It is difficult to imagine how much effort a practitioner should put into motivating people to engage in self help projects on a voluntary basis if the state is oppressive and does not lend moral and other support. In the view of Swift (1980), where the government of a country is oppressive, encouraging people to engage in self help projects is tantamount to suggesting that they become partners in their own exploitation for self help relieves the government of its duty to distribute resources justly and this turns the attention of the poor away from the real cause of their plight. Zimbabwe is lucky to have a democratic government that encourages self help, self determination and voluntary effort.

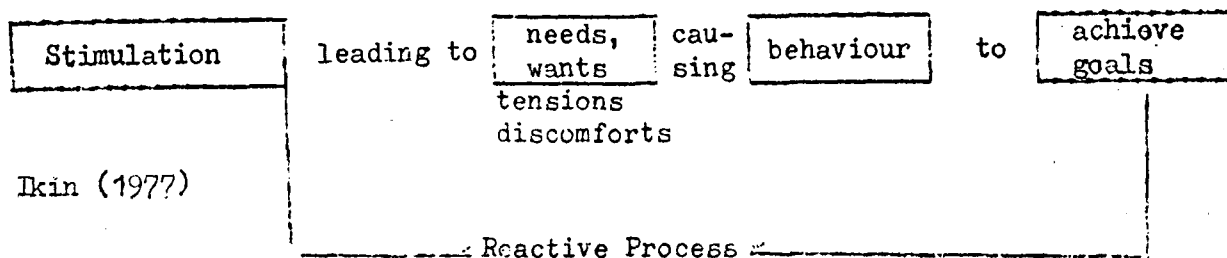
Why Community Workers Intervene in People's lives

One of the reasons is to do with the belief held by community workers about the nature of man and the relationships which ought to exist between them. Another reason is to do with community workers' judgement about what is feasible in particular circumstances after weighing up equally valued alternatives. Thirdly, the community workers' judgement refined by training and experience of methods which in a particular instance are most likely to produce desired results. In short community workers intervene because they hope to influence people's lives with the ultimate goal being positive social change.

Social Influence Techniques: In order to be able to influence people community workers need to be well versed in social influence techniques. There are many many of these techniques but I will review only two such techniques just to illustrate my point. Many of the working principles in applied community development do not come from a methodology which is peculiar to community development, but rather from writings which apply techniques from such disciplines as Psychology and Sociology to the field of professional management (Ikin, 1977). Let us examine these techniques.

Firstly the process of influencing people may wish to borrow from the proposition that any agency or person who desires to change an individual or group must recognise that:-

- power rests with the change, thus people will not change their behaviour unless the required change is of their own free will.
- people must be enabled to see things your way if you are to be an effective agent of change. In short your objective must become theirs.
- The following formula could be useful:



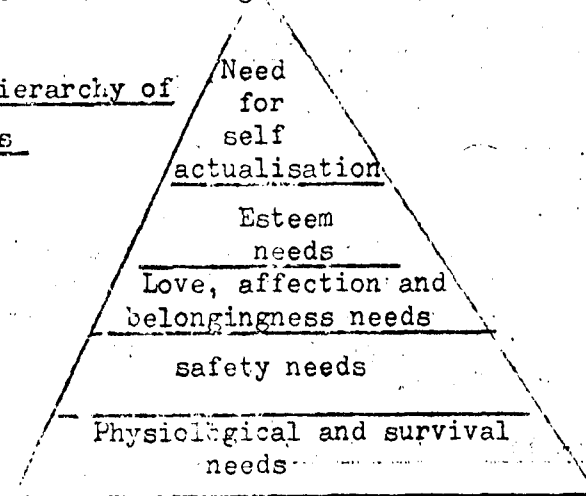
Leavitt is quoted by Ikin (1977) as suggesting that this closed cycle formula contains the assumption that :-

- i) Behaviour is caused
- ii) Behaviour is motivated
- iii) Behaviour is goal directed.

Ikin (1977) argues that this formula provides for the practice of community development, exactly what it provides for the business manager, "a key with which he might unlock the door guarding the mystery of human behaviour.

The process of stimulating people should also borrow from the work of Maslow. His hierarchy of human needs is a theory that has been applied in the field of professional management. The theory postulates that needs on successively higher levels of the triangle are not motivators unless the need at the level below has been satisfied. (see triangle).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs



By way of illustration, a good example from the hierarchy is that it would be naive and pointless to offer a large sum of money, for instance to someone dying of thirst. The hierarchy dictates that the prime requirement in this particular case is water. The theory has some merit. Community development workers can take a leaf from Maslow's work if they wish to succeed in influencing or motivating people.

Community development workers should also be familiar with certain methods that are peculiar to their profession, for instance how to enlist popular participation, how to organize group activities and build up other institutions so as to involve people more effectively. They should also know how to stimulate self help and a sense of community among the people.

Community Development and the Concept of Participation

According to a United Nations Report (1971) community development should reassert more forcefully its emphasis on the human factor. In other words it should have the development of man and development for man as its primary objective. Community development should also reaffirm its faith in the capacity of man to learn and change through voluntary methods, free of coercion. In view of the foregoing, it is important that community development seeks to promote the voluntary participation of individuals and groups in the development process and builds institutions that support this objective. As the U.N. report argued, community development should not disproportionately emphasize the economic aspects of development but rather maintain its original commitment to a balanced social-economic development. The social element of course emphasizes participation of the people in their development.

Two approaches to the question of participation are currently in operation, namely the 'top down' and the 'bottom up' approaches. As far as the top down approach is concerned, decisions are ideally made at the top before they are passed on to the people for implementation. There is very little room, if any, for people to participate particularly at the planning stage. On the other hand the bottom up approach operates in a different manner - on paper that is. Ideally people decide what projects they want, then the decisions are channelled to the authorities for ratification before the people implement them. This approach, though apparently better than the top down one in terms of facilitating participation, often does not work for various reasons not least of which is the fact that the authorities often withhold vital information so that decision making on the part of the people is rendered meaningless.

Admittedly this is a very crude manner of describing how the two approaches operate but the point is both these approaches are by and large unworkable. In place of these two I will propose a 'middle-of-the-road' approach which I will term the "lateral" approach. The point of departure of this suggested approach would be the premise that the people and the authorities are "equal citizens" and hence mechanisms should be devised to ensure they are afforded equal weighting in decision making. In other words, no party should be more equal than the other. Both sides should start from a footing of equal status in order to make meaningful decisions for the development of their community. There are three cardinal variables associated with such an approach - namely consultation, co-operation and co-ordination of effort. These variables are vital for the success of the 'lateral' approach to decision making. Such an approach would in my view facilitate meaningful participation.

The City Council and Urban Community Development

a) The policies of the colonial regime

which

The community development approach was adopted by the colonial government was based on coercion. In many instances the regime followed policies of paternalism and indirect force in urban areas whereby:-

- they defined the needs of the people
- they provided services for the people
- they persuaded people to follow what 'experts' thought was good for them.

This approach meant that the authorities decided, planned and organized services in response to the people's needs. This of course means that the more the authorities provided for the people, the less the people needed to think plan and gain experience in management to effect total development. It meant that people did not participate in decisions that affected their daily lives.

Analysing the conduct of the community development approach adopted in the then Rhodesia, Bratton (1978) pointed out that the cardinal precepts of community development - those of participation and voluntarism were violated in the Rhodesian political - economic context. Thus the previous regime pursued a negative approach to community development which violated the accepted rules. It was a directive and paternalistic approach which by implication meant that the authorities had no faith in the ability of the people to determine their own destiny. The government believed that the people do not know what is good for themselves and things need to be worked out and provided by the so called experts.

Nowhere is the paternalistic approach of the colonial regime better demonstrated than in the area of housing. The housing strategies were those of planning building and providing houses to the people. People were allocated houses on the understanding that they should pay for the service in turn but such housing programmes were not allocated to the poor who could not afford the costs. As a result there was a decline in decent housing which largely accounted for the increase in the growth of slums and squatter settlements.

The Positive (non-directive) Approach to Community Development

This is an approach which recognizes the basic precepts of community development, namely participation and voluntarism. The underlying principles of this approach is that the authorities in dealing with people try to:-

- i) get people to decide for themselves what their needs are and allow them to lay down their priorities.
- ii) find out what action people are willing to take so as to meet their needs.
- iii) find out and help on how they can best organise, plan and act to carry out their projects.

In short, the approach allows for consultation, co-operation and co-ordination of efforts on the part of the people and the authorities. The assumption is that people are in general capable of planning, organizing and deciding and acting on issues that affect them if they are helped. The advantage of this approach is that it develops people in managerial skills, leadership and effectively brings about permanent development for a community as well as a nation. This indeed is a positive approach which augurs well for socialist goals and objectives which the Zimbabwe Government is pursuing.

To^again give housing as an example, after independence the new government of Zimbabwe realized the need to provide more housing to the people. They adopted a people oriented housing policy with an emphasis on people to participate in the process of developing housing. In order to reduce costs, people are encouraged to build houses within their financial capabilities to meet their basic need for shelter. The other motive for increasing people's participation in the housing process is the belief that when people own their houses, they are mostly better and able to improve and maintain them leading to better communities overall.

A Critique of the Community Development Strategy

In many countries, community development has failed to improve the living standards of the poor. One of the major problems is that local elites are accepted as leaders and these elites will hijack the community projects for reasons of personal aggrandisement. Hence there is often conflict between rich peasants and poor peasants. This has often led to a polarization in relations within the community and hence a loss of interest in community projects.

This is a fundamental dilemma and a point which hardly needs elaboration.

Critics have also accused community development for serving political ends. Sometimes, governments have used it either to maintain the status quo or to combat unacceptable ideologies while others have used it as a tool of social control. Very often, the so called experts dictate what needs to be done and this of course robs people of the facility to participate. This might cause frustration and breed ill-feeling among the people.

The fact that community development is usually under state control in most countries means its approach has been 'top down' in nature, and this of course is against the idea of participation. In such cases, participation is given as a favour and not as a right. The problem is very often the authorities pay lip service to the idea of participation and they look on community development as a handy and ready-made mechanism for the implementation of national plans imposed from above. There is usually a huge gap existing between the authorities and the people. And even at the grass-roots level, the concept of participation is also often conflict ridden with a lot of mud-slinging often the order of the day.

CONCLUSION

While it is true that community development is not a substitute for the normal build-up of the municipal infrastructure or the normal development of the traditional municipal services or utilities, it must be conceded that this strategy has great scope and possibilities for urban development. Indeed there is a case for community development as an approach in the development process of urban areas of developing countries. In the last decade or so its role has become even more critical as the discrepancy between the needs of the population and the abilities of the municipal services to meet these needs has continued to grow. While it is a fact that community development should not be regarded as a panacea for the alleviation of all urban problems, it is equally true to say that community development is a very important strategy for this development and that is probably one of the major reasons why "it has gained nearly universal recognition as a force for inducing social and economic change in developing nations". (UN, 1971, p1).

REFERENCES

- Baldock, P. (1974) Community Work and Social Work
London Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Bertholet (1963) "Community Development in Urban Environment"
Tilburg, April 1963
- Bratton, M. (1978) Beyond Community Development
Mambo Press, Gweru
- Ikin, A.H. (1977) "Non-Formal Education in Community Development"
(Handout) September 1977
- Lipton, M. (1977) Why Poor Stay Poor. Urban Bias in World Development
London, Temple Smith
- Rothman, J (1977) In Coxetal Strategies of Community Organization
U.S.A. Peacock Publishing
- Seers, D. (1972) "The Meaning of Development" in N. Uphoff et al (eds) The Political Economy of Development.
Berkeley University of California Press
- Sjostrom, R. et al (1983) How Do You Spell Development?
Scandanavian Inst. of African Studies Uppsala
- Swift, P. (1980) Community Development and Critical Consciousness.
MSC Dissertation LSE
- Todaro, M. (1977) Economic For A Developing World
London, Longman
- United Nations (1971) Popular Participation in Development Emerging Trends in Community Development
United Nations, New York



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 License.

To view a copy of the license please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

This is a download from the BLDS Digital Library on OpenDocs
<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>